



Materials Safety

Sharps Safety

A Message from Rick Kelly

I am repeatedly struck by the fact that apparently simple and routine actions can have the potential for doing great harm. These notes are distributed just as a reminder that everything we do needs to be done in the context of safety and the thought "what can possibly go wrong."

—Paul Alivisatos,
Division Director



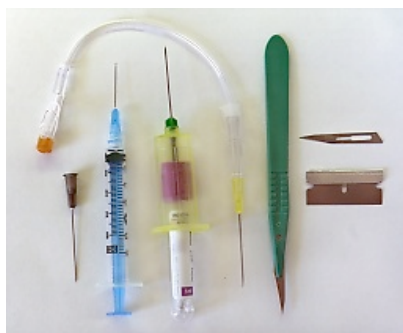
Problem:

Recently, a janitor in a MSD building was nearly injured by a broken pair of scissors that had been inappropriately placed in the trash. This "near miss" highlights the need to be continuously vigilant about the disposal of sharp tools, blades, glass and needles, items usually referred to as "sharps".

A "sharp" is any device having corners, edges, or projections capable of cutting or piercing the skin. Most scissors fit the definition of "sharps". There are several different categories of "sharps" that require different disposal techniques.

- Needles, scalpels, catheters and razor blades must be placed into a designated "sharps" container and disposed of with the "medical waste". This is required even if the sharps have never been used with biological tissues.

- Sharps free of biological and chemical contamination should be placed in sharps containers and the "Biohazard" label should be obliterated and replaced with the hand-written label "Unregulated sharps". This is how the broken scissors should have been managed.
- Sharps wastes that are contaminated with radioactive and/or chemical materials must not be put into the red sharps containers—contact Howard Hansen at 5867 to determine how to best manage these items.



Laboratory glass sharps free from any biohazardous, radioactive, and chemical contamination should be disposed of by packaging in a cardboard box or other rigid container. This policy includes the disposal of the following uncontaminated items:

- * Broken glass
- * Pasteur pipettes
- * Glass slides
- * Glass vials

When the box containing the glassware is full, seal the box closed and label "Broken Glass". Set the box out for janitorial pickup. You can purchase cardboard boxes made especially for glassware disposal as depicted below.



There are additional requirements for the disposal of biologically contaminated sharp glassware—contact Howard Hansen at x5867 for guidance in these cases.

